

Hospitals begin to limp out of the latest COVID-19 surge

By H. HOLLINGSWORTH and
DAVE KOLPACK
Associated Press

As omicron numbers drop at Denver Health, Dr. Anuj Mehta is reminded of the scene in the 1980 comedy "The Blues Brothers" when John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd pile out of a battered car after a police chase.

Suddenly, all the doors pop off the hinges, the front wheels fall off and smoke pours from the engine.

"And that's my fear," said Mehta, a pulmonary and critical care physician. "I'm worried that as soon as we stop, everything's just going to fall apart."

Across the U.S., the number of people in the hospital with COVID-19 has tumbled more than 28% over the past three weeks to about 105,000 on average, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



A person walks between buildings at the University of Kansas Hospital Friday, Jan. 28, 2022, in Kansas City, Kan.

Associated Press

Continued on Page 2

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Hospitals begin to limp out of the latest COVID-19 surge

Continued from Front

But the ebbing of the omicron surge has left in its wake postponed surgeries, exhausted staff members and uncertainty over whether this is the last big wave or whether another one lies ahead.

"What we want to see is that the omicron surge continues to decrease, that we don't see another variant of concern emerge, that we start to come out of the other side of this," said Dr. Chris Beyrer, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

But he added: "We've been proven wrong twice already, with delta and omicron. So that adds to people's anxiety and uncertainty and sense of like

"When does this end?"

Another reason for anxiety: COVID-19 hospitalizations aren't even all that low. They are at a level seen in January 2021, amid last winter's surge.

Hospitals limped through the omicron surge with workforces that already were depleted after many staff members quit the profession. The remaining health care workers got sick in droves. In some hospitals, office staff was assigned to help make beds. Now, many hospitals are still in crisis mode, as they work to reschedule people whose hip replacements and even cancer and brain surgeries were put off during the omicron crisis to free up bed space and nurses to care for COVID-19 patients.

Even in North Dakota, which has consistently ranked near the top in the number of COVID-19 cases relative to the population, hospitals have seen a dramatic drop in virus patients. However, executives at Dakotas-based Sanford Health said their hospitals are still full.

"We've been running hard for a couple years here now, but I am not sure that I sense relief," said Dr. Doug Griffin, a vice president and medical officer for Sanford in Fargo, North Dakota. "Most of our caregivers are giving care to other patients. We still have some very, very sick people coming in for all sorts of reasons."

At the Cleveland Clinic's 13 Ohio hospitals, the number of patients with COVID-19



A room is empty in the COVID-19 Intensive Care Unit at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center sits empty, in Lebanon, N.H., Monday, Jan. 3, 2022.

Associated Press

has fallen to 280, down from an all-time pandemic high of around 1,200. Surgeries began to be delayed at the end of December, and the situation is just now returning to normal, said Dr. Raed Dweik, head of the system's respiratory institute.

The hope, he said, is that this is the last big surge and that the hospitals can begin to catch up.

"We've had our hopes dashed before that. 'Oh, this is the end of the pandemic and this virus,'" he said.

"Every time we we say something like this, it's kind of laughed at us, and it comes back with a new variant."

Dr. Craig Spencer, a New York City emergency room physician, tweeted a week ago: "Just worked 12 hours in the ER on a busy Monday and didn't have a single Covid patient. Not one. This ain't over. But it's a helluva lot better than even just a few weeks ago."

Spencer said Tuesday that he had another COVID-free shift during the overnight hours Friday and Saturday.

"I am getting a somewhat random sample, of course, but just compared

to a month ago, it's a complete sea change, which is great," he said.

Mary Turner, who is president of the Minnesota Nurses Association and works as a COVID-19 ICU nurse, said patient numbers remain high because "of all the other people who didn't go to their appointments or their follow-ups who are coming in with all the other conditions."

If there is any relief, Turner said, it's being able to walk into a patient's room without having to wear full protective gear.

"It's like heaven" to walk in and just don a pair of gloves, she said.

At the eight-hospital Beaumont Health system in Michigan, the number of COVID-19 patients fell to 250 on Tuesday, down from last month's omicron peak of 851.

Dr. Justin Skrzynski, an internal medicine physician who runs a COVID-19 floor at Beaumont Health's hospital in Royal Oak, said patient care is about 90% back to normal and he finds reason for optimism, noting that the combination of vaccinations and immunity from infections should provide some protection. □

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Money on the table: child credit \$ available via tax returns

By **JOSH BOAK**
Associated Press

The Biden administration wants families with children to know that there is roughly \$193 billion waiting for them — all they need to do is file their taxes to claim it. That estimated total is what remains of the expanded child tax credit, and the administration is concerned that some of those most in need of the assistance may be the least likely to get what is due to them. President Joe Biden increased the payments and expanded who was eligible as part of his coronavirus relief package. While most families already received half of the credit as monthly payments last year, they'll lose out on the remaining balance unless they file their taxes.

Vice President Kamala Harris, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and White House senior adviser Gene Sperling held a virtual event Tuesday to encourage people to send their tax forms to the IRS, including those whose incomes are so low that they might not have traditionally filed.

Harris said that families should go to childtaxcredit.gov to check their eligibility. The tax filing deadline is April 18.

"The truth is there are people across our nation who work hard every day and still struggle to get by and it should not be this way in our country," Harris said. "You still need to file your taxes. That is the only way to receive the second half of what you are owed."

The public push is occurring at a critical juncture for both the U.S. economy and the child tax credit program. Inflation is running at a nearly 40-year high, meaning that the additional money from the credit will help offset the costs of food, gasoline and other goods as the U.S. is still emerging from the pandemic. But efforts to renew the expanded credits for another year have been blocked in the Senate, making it important for advocates to demonstrate how the credits have re-

duced child poverty by an estimated 40%.

Yellen said research suggests that the payments are among the most promising policies for combating poverty, highlighting recent research to suggest that the money was linked to higher brain activity in the babies of poor mothers.

"There is very little equivocation that these policies lift up the lives of millions of people, and, in so doing, lift up the country," Yellen said.

Several lawmakers and nonprofits are taking part in the outreach, and there are plans to hold events in all 50 states and Puerto Rico during the tax filing season. Yellen noted that nonprofits are often better at reaching out to poorer populations.

As part of the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package, Biden increased the child tax credits to \$3,600 annually for each child aged 5 or under and \$3,000 for those who are ages 6 to 17. The government began to send the payments out on a monthly basis starting last July, meaning that there are six months worth of payments waiting to be claimed by people filing their taxes.

The administration estimates that roughly 58 million households would qualify for the credit, which average \$3,300 and could be used to offset an existing tax bill or be paid out as a refund.

Workers without children could also get additional help this tax season if they file. The relief package nearly tripled the earned income tax credit for workers without dependent children, meaning that 17 million people could receive credits worth \$1,500.

The expanded child tax credits were seen as slashing child poverty to the lowest levels on record. A recent analysis by researchers at Washington University in St. Louis and Appalachian State University found no evidence that the monthly payments caused parents to stop



Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen delivers remarks encouraging Americans to take advantage of tax credits, including the expanded Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit, in the South Court Auditorium on the White House campus, Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022, in Washington.

Associated Press

working. But critics say that making the credits larger and fully refundable — which ensures that poorer families qualify for the entire benefit — leads to fewer people taking jobs that pay and creates a drag on the economy. □

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Opioid fight needs new strategy, Cabinet leadership: report

By R. ALONSO-ZALDIVAR

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. needs a nimble, multipronged strategy and Cabinet-level leadership to counter its festering overdose epidemic, a bipartisan congressional commission advises.

With vastly powerful synthetic drugs like fentanyl driving record overdose deaths, the scourge of opioids awaits after the COVID-19 pandemic finally recedes, a shift that public health experts expect in the months ahead.

"This is one of our most pressing national security, law enforcement and public health challenges, and we must do more as a nation and a government to protect our most precious resource — American lives," the Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking said in a 70-page report released Tuesday.

The report envisions a dynamic strategy. It would rely on law enforcement and diplomacy to shut down sources of chemicals used to make synthetic opioids. It would offer treatment and support for people who become addicted, creating pathways that can lead back to productive lives. And it would invest in research to better understand addiction's grip on the human brain and to develop treatments for opioid use disorder.



Signs are displayed at a tent during a health event on June 26, 2021, in Charleston, W.Va.

Associated Press

The global coronavirus pandemic has overshadowed the American opioid epidemic for the last two years, but recent news that overdose deaths surpassed 100,000 in one year caught the public's attention. Politically, federal legislation to address the opioid crisis won support across the partisan divide during both the Obama and Trump administrations.

Rep. David Trone, D-Md., a co-chair of the panel that produced the report, said he believes that support is still there, and that the issue appeals to Biden's prag-

matic side. "The president has been crystal clear," Trone said. "These are two major issues in America: addiction and mental health." Trone's counterpart was Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark. The U.S. government has been waging a losing "war on drugs" for decades. The stakes are much higher now with the widespread availability of fentanyl, a synthetic painkiller 80 to 100 times more powerful than morphine. It can be baked into illicit pills made to look like prescription painkillers or anti-anxiety medicines. The chemical raw materi-

als are produced mainly in China. Criminal networks in Mexico control the production and shipment to the U.S. Federal anti-drug strategy traditionally emphasized law enforcement and long prison sentences. But that came to be seen as tainted by racial bias and counter-productive because drug use is treatable. The value of treatment has recently gained recognition with anti-addiction medicines in wide use alongside older strategies like support groups. The report endorsed both law enforcement and treatment,

working in sync with one another.

"Through its work, the commission came to recognize the impossibility of reducing the availability of illegal synthetic opioids through efforts focused on supply alone," the report said.

"Real progress can come only by pairing illicit synthetic opioid supply disruption with decreasing the domestic U.S. demand for these drugs," it added.

The report recommends what it calls five "pillars" for government action:

— Elevating the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy to act as the nerve center for far-flung federal efforts, and restoring Cabinet rank to its director.

— Disrupting the supply of drugs through better coordinated law enforcement actions.

— Reducing the demand for illicit drugs through treatment and by efforts to mitigate the harm to people addicted. Treatment programs should follow science-based "best practices."

— Using diplomacy to enlist help from other governments in cutting off the supply of chemicals that criminal networks use to manufacture fentanyl.

— Developing surveillance and data analysis tools to spot new trends in illicit drug use before they morph into major problems for society. □



An American flag flies outside the Department of Justice in Washington, March 22, 2019.

Associated Press

By ERIC TUCKER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department an-

nounced Tuesday its largest-ever financial seizure — more than \$3.5 billion — and the arrests of a New

Justice Dept. announces \$3.6B crypto seizure, 2 arrests

York couple accused of conspiring to launder billions of dollars in cryptocurrency stolen from the 2016 hack of a virtual currency exchange. Federal law enforcement officials said they recovered roughly \$3.6 billion in cryptocurrency linked to the hack of Bitfinex, a virtual currency exchange whose systems were breached nearly six years ago.

Ilya "Dutch" Lichtenstein, a citizen of Russia and the United States, and his wife, Heather Morgan, were ar-

rested in Manhattan on Tuesday morning, accused of relying on various sophisticated techniques to launder the stolen money and conceal the transactions. They face federal charges of conspiracy to commit money laundering and conspiracy to defraud the United States. It was unclear if they had lawyers or people who could speak on their behalf.

They were in custody pending an appearance in Manhattan's federal court later Tuesday.

"The message to criminals is clear: cryptocurrency is not a safe haven.

We can and we will follow the money, no matter what form it takes," Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said in a video statement released by the Justice Department.

The couple was not charged in the Bitfinex hack, which resulted in the theft of almost than 120,000 bitcoin — at the time valued at nearly \$71 million and is now worth more than \$4.5 billion, officials said. □

COVID-19 protests threaten border trade between Canada, U.S.

By R. GILLIES/T. LINDEMAN

Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario (AP) —

Canadian lawmakers expressed increasing worry Tuesday about the economic effects of disruptive demonstrations after the busiest border crossing between the U.S. and Canada became partially blocked by truckers protesting vaccine mandates and other COVID-19 restrictions.

The blockade at the Ambassador Bridge between Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, prevented traffic from entering Canada while some U.S.-bound traffic was still moving, Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino said, calling the bridge "one of the most important border crossings in the world." It carries 25% of all trade between Canada and the United States.

Canadian Transport Minister Omar Alghabra said such blockades will have serious implications on the economy and supply chains. "I've already heard from automakers and food grocers. This is really a serious cause for concern," he said in Ottawa, the capital. Added Mendicino: "Most Canadians understand there is a difference between being tired and fatigued with the pandemic and crossing into some other universe."



Trucks are backed up heading to and from Canada on the Ambassador Bridge, due to protests on the Windsor side, in Detroit on Monday, Feb. 7, 2022.

Associated Press

Speaking in an emergency debate late Monday in Parliament, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the protesters are "trying to blockade our economy, our democracy," and it has to stop.

The daily demonstrations staged by the so-called Freedom Truck Convoy began in Ottawa, where demonstrators have used hundreds of parked trucks to paralyze parts of the capital for more than 10 days. The protests have infuriated people who live around downtown, including neighborhoods near Parliament Hill, the seat of

the federal government. Dave Weatherall, a federal civil servant, lives near the truckers' prime staging area in a city-owned parking lot outside of the downtown core. "They're using the lot to terrorize people in Centretown," he said, asking why the city has allowed the convoy to remain parked on its property for free and without intervention.

"It's the first time since having kids that I've seriously wondered about the world we brought them into. I always figured they could handle most things the world will throw at them,

but this feels different," he said.

Demonstrations have spread to locations on or near the Canadian border, including the Ambassador Bridge, where a protest caused long backups and at one point stopped traffic in both directions. The bridge remains blocked on the road to Canada.

At a news conference after Trudeau spoke, trucker spokesman Tom Marrazo reiterated that the protesters want to overthrow the government. Marrazo said he is willing to meet with the opposition parties and the nation's governor gen-

eral, the representative of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II as head of state.

All three opposition parties technically could join together and defeat the government because Trudeau does not have the majority of seats in Parliament, but that is highly unlikely because the vast majority of lawmakers have condemned the protests.

Protesters have also closed another important U.S. Canada border crossing in Coutts, Alberta.

"The border at Coutts continues to open and close at the discretion of a group of protesters who believe they are above the law. It has to stop," tweeted Rachel Notley, Alberta's former premier and current opposition New Democrat leader. Protesters have said they will not leave until all vaccine mandates and COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. They also called for the removal of Trudeau's government, though it is responsible for few of the restrictive measures, most of which were put in place by provincial governments.

François Laporte, the president of Teamsters Canada, which represents over 55,000 drivers, including 15,000 long-haul truck drivers, said the protests do not represent the industry in which 90% of drivers are vaccinated. □

Dutch government names commissioner to tackle #MeToo issues

By MIKE CORDER

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands

(AP) — The Dutch government appointed a commissioner Tuesday to tackle sexual abuse and intimidation, after recent high-profile #MeToo cases shocked the European Union nation. In recent weeks, the popular television talent show "The Voice of Holland" has been taken off the air amid complaints of unwanted behavior ranging from sexually-tinted WhatsApp messages to an allegation of rape involving present-

ers. On Sunday, a senior executive at the country's biggest soccer club quit and apologized for what the club called a "series of inappropriate messages" sent to several female colleagues.

"Recent incidents in the sports and television world show us that the reason for the #MeToo movement in our country is still alive. This must change," said Education, Culture and Science Minister Robbert Dijkgraaf. "We are working on a culture change in which no one looks away and in

which people hold each other accountable for wrong behavior. Because every victim of sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence is one too many," he added.

The government appointed a respected former lawmaker and labor union leader, Mariëtte Hamer, to a three-year term as the new commissioner, saying her role is to help mold a national action plan to tackle sexually inappropriate behavior and sexual violence.

The announcement came



Hundreds of people protested in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Saturday, Jan. 29, 2022, in a #MeToo demonstration sparked by allegations of sexual improprieties linked to a popular Dutch TV talent show.

Associated Press

as Labor Party lawmaker Gijs van Dijk quit Parliament after his party said it was launching an independent

investigation into several reports about his "undesirable behavior in the private sphere." □

U.S. and Russia clash over use and impact of U.N. sanctions

By EDITH M. LEDERER

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) —

The United States and its allies clashed with Russia and China in the U.N. Security Council on Monday over the usefulness and impact of U.N. sanctions, which are currently imposed on countries from North Korea to Yemen and Congo as well as the al-Qaida and Islamic State extremist groups and their affiliates and supporters. Russia, which holds the council presidency this meeting and chose the topic -- preventing humanitarian and unintended consequences of sanctions -- also lashed out at unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States, European Union and other countries and groups.

U.N. political chief Rosemary DiCarlo told the council there are 14 U.N. sanctions regimes: As examples, in Libya, Mali, South Sudan and Yemen they support conflict resolution; in Guinea Bissau they aim to deter unconstitutional changes of government; in Central African Republic, Congo and Somalia they curb the illicit exploitation of natural resources that fund armed groups; in North Korea, they target proliferation activities; and they constrain Islamic State and al-Qaida terrorist threats.

DiCarlo said U.N. sanctions



The Security Council stakeout area is closed off to members of the media during the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 23, 2020, at U.N. headquarters.

Associated Press

are no longer "the blunt instrument they once were." Since the 1990s, they have undergone changes to minimize possible adverse consequences on civilians and third countries, and the Security Council has included and provided humanitarian exemptions in most sanctions regimes, she said.

Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador Dmitry Polyansky, who chaired the meeting, said many sanctions regimes interfere with plans for state-building and economic development, pointing to Central African

Republic and Sudan and calling the measures on Guinea Bissau "anachronistic." The Security Council needs "to take greater heed of what the authorities of states under sanctions think" and be more realistic in setting benchmarks to lift them to make sure they don't turn into "a mission impossible," he said. U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield countered that sanctions are "a potent tool" that "make it harder for terrorists to raise funds via international financial systems," and have slowed development of

"certain capabilities" in North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Sanctions also "constrain the resources of those who would spoil peace processes, threaten U.N. peacekeepers, commit atrocities, and obstruct humanitarian assistance," she said. Britain's deputy ambassador James Kariyuki said the value of U.N. sanctions were proven in Angola, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone where "they helped end conflict and support the transition to peace and democracy" and were then lifted.

"In the Central African Republic, they've improved the practices of a mining company," he said. "In Somalia, the arms embargo has enabled the seizure of thousands of ammunition rounds, anti-tank guided missiles, and sniper-fire rifles reportedly intended for al-Shabab," the al-Qaida-linked extremist group.

Russia's Polyansky took special aim at sanctions imposed outside the U.N. by countries or groups, which he said "remain a serious impediment for full-fledged functioning of humanitarian exemptions," citing problems with contractors, carriers, cargo insurance and bank transactions.

He also said Russia proceeds from the understanding that only U.N. sanctions "are legitimate," and that broader use of unilateral sanctions "undermines the norms and institutes of the international law."

Polyansky claimed "secondary sanctions of major Western powers create a 'toxic vibe' around Pyongyang" that discourages cooperation even in areas not touched by international restrictions. He also cited what he called the "war of sanctions" against Russia's ally Syria, which has very negatively affected its economy, as well as U.S. sanctions against Cuba and Venezuela. □



Food supplies of wheat are distributed during a visit by World Food Programme (WFP) Regional Director Michael Dunford to a camp for the internally-displaced in Adadle, in the Somali Region of Ethiopia Saturday, Jan. 22, 2022.

Associated Press

U.N.: 13 million people face severe hunger in Horn of Africa

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) —

Drought conditions have left an estimated 13 million people facing severe hunger in the Horn of Africa, according to the United Nations World Food Program.

People in a region including Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya face the driest conditions recorded since 1981, the agency reported Tuesday, calling for immediate assistance to forestall a major humanitarian crisis. Drought conditions are affecting pastoral and farming communities across southern and south-eastern

Ethiopia, south-eastern and northern Kenya, and south-central Somalia. Malnutrition rates are high in the region.

WFP said it needs \$327 million to look after the urgent needs of 4.5 million people over the next six months and help communities become more resilient to extreme climate shocks.

"Three consecutive failed rainy seasons have decimated crops and caused abnormally high livestock deaths," it said in a statement. "Shortages of water and pasture are forcing families from their homes

and leading to increased conflict between communities." More forecasts of below-average rainfall threaten to worsen conditions in the coming months, it said. Others have raised alarm over a fragile region that also faces sporadic armed violence.

The U.N. children's agency said earlier in February that more than 6 million people in Ethiopia are expected to need urgent humanitarian aid by mid-March. In neighboring Somalia, more than 7 million people need urgent help, according to the Somali NGO Consortium. □



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Haiti braces for further instability amid grim anniversary

By DÁNICA COTO and
EVENS SANON

Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP)

— Schools and businesses across Haiti shuttered their doors on Monday and large numbers of police patrolled the streets as the country confronted a grim anniversary.

Monday marked not only seven months since President Jovenel Moïse was slain at his private residence but also the end of his term, with opponents demanding that Prime Minister Ariel Henry step down, arguing that his administration is unconstitutional.

Henry brushed aside those criticisms during a press conference on Monday evening where he again pledged to create a provisional electoral council to pave the way for general elections. He noted that exactly 36 years ago, former Haitian dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier fled the country amid a violent uprising. "Thirty-six years later, we must realize that we have failed to establish a truly democratic system," Henry said, adding that for every three steps forward, the country goes back two steps. Henry blamed the economy for most of Haiti's ongoing problems, saying it was too small to allow people to live well, get jobs or obtain good government services. He said his administration is fighting to reduce a surge in violence and is looking for more resources to help those in need. "We know there is a lot of misery out there," he said. Thousands of people opted to stay home on Monday, afraid that even greater violence would erupt as Haiti's political instability deepens, kidnappings spike and gangs grow more powerful amid

a crumbling economy as they prey on those in need. Lionel Fortuné, a 33-year-old law student, was among the few who ventured outside and waited a long time for a public bus to materialize on the empty streets. "This country has totally deteriorated," he said. "You don't know who you can count on, who you can trust to lead the country to the right path."

Henry has promised to hold general elections by the end of this year as his administration tries to improve security conditions. Haiti currently has only 10 elected officials since it failed to hold legislative elections in October 2019 amid political gridlock and massive protests, with Moïse ruling by decree for more than a year before was killed.

Since then, numerous opponents have challenged Henry and nominated their own leaders, moves that the prime minister has not recognized. "The basic thing today is not to fight for a short-lived piece of power," Henry said. "No one has the authority or the right to meet at a hotel or abroad to decide in a small committee who is to be president or prime minister. All this is a distraction."

Bocchit Edmond, Haiti's ambassador to the U.S., echoed those thoughts in an interview with The Associated Press, saying that Henry did not make himself prime minister but rather was chosen by a legitimate and democratically elected president. He said the process of choosing an electoral council was very well advanced and called on opponents to dialogue with Henry and work together, adding that he remains optimistic elections will be held. "My only fear is to see my country

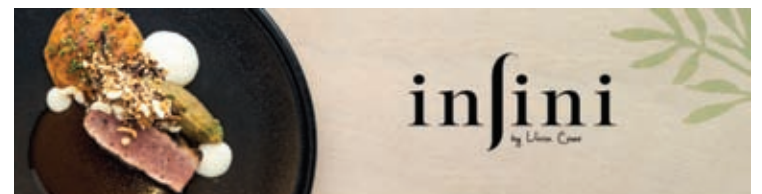


Demonstrators carry around a mock coffin as they protest for justice in connection with the assassination of late President Jovenel Moïse in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Monday, Feb. 7, 2022.

Associated Press

not moving forward," Edmond said. He dismissed accusations that Henry is not considered a legitimate leader given that Haiti's chief public prosecutor, whom Henry has since fired, noted that the prime minister spoke with one of the main suspects in the presidential slaying hours after it occurred. Henry has said he received multiple calls that day and doesn't remember all of them.

"It's an ongoing investigation," Edmond said. "Let us leave (this to) the justice system." One of the most high-profile groups that oppose Henry, the Montana Accord, named after the hotel where it was signed, has proposed a two-year transitional period to allow Haiti time to create a safer environment for voters. The group, made up of thousands of supporters including prominent politicians and civil society leaders, recently nominated as its leader Fritz Jean, former governor of the Bank of the Republic of Haiti. □



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**Asi Es Mi Peru restaurant launches Chef Table 5 Course Menu:
“It feels like having dinner at home in Peru”**



EAGLE BEACH - Peruvian-born Roxanna Salinas is the proud owner of a restaurant that without doubt serves the purest Peruvian specialties in Aruba: **Asi Es Mi Peru** at Paradise Beach Villas. She herself welcomes you in ‘her home’ as that is how the restaurant is described by Peruvian foodies: Food like home, for sure the best compliment a restaurant can get. “Everything here is 100 % Peruvian, we are authentic and ethnic.” Peru by the way is considered to be the single most important cuisine in Latin America with a repertoire of dishes that might even beat France. Many big-name chefs travel to the country to get inspired.

How It All Started

“Many years ago during a Christmas gathering with family my mom told me why I did not open a Peruvian restaurant in Aruba. She said: who does not love Peruvian food?” That was the trigger for the start because Roxanne loves cooking, it is in her genes. Her mom and grandmother were great cooks. “My base principle was to do everything original and authentic. When guests

come to this restaurant I want to serve them the food as if you were dining the best dishes in a house in Peru. The taste is equal, nothing is fused or changed. Many Peruvians that come here say: I feel like I am having dinner at home. It is very difficult to please Peruvians as naturally they know best what is authentic.” To find her Chef and Sous Chef she went to Peru where she interviewed 190 applicants. “We had more than 400 people that applied, after a screening that my brother and I did, we were left with 190 and out of them 10 cooked for me. I gave them a basket with ingredients and a certain plate they had to cook. Based on that I chose the Chef and Sous Chef.”

Chef Table 5 Course Menu

Peruvian food is remarkable for the diversity of its ingredients. It might be best known for its ceviche, the marinated seafood dish, but bestsellers are also Lomo Saltado (stir fry strips sirloin), seafood rice and Pescado a lo Macho (fish of the day). Roxanne explains that recently the Chef launched a 5-course Chef Table Menu. “Now that we have standardized our typical Peruvian cuisine, we are ready to take it to the next



level. Our Chef is very knowledgeable and we bring higher cuisine to the table.” Of the 5 courses the first is the Tiradito Tres Regiones, and the 2nd the Majao de Yuca con Pargo Escabechado paired with a wonderful Santiago Ruiz Albarino; The 3rd plate is a Cremosa de Quinoa con Aji Relleno paired with a Hahn Pinot Noir, the 4th the Lomo con Salsa de Hongos Andinos paired with a Merlot Santa Margarita, and the 5th a Crocante de Maracuya. Try this wonderful culinary experience!

Roxanne explains that the Peruvian food is influenced by different cultures. “A lot of people came from China to work in the sugar plantations, Japanese came to work in the rice fields and African immigrants brought their influences as well... that’s why you see a fusion in the dishes. The typical food and plates from Peru mixed with these influences make up for an excellent cuisine. Our sushi for example is totally different than the standard sushi and we have so many pastas that are outside of Italian pastas. The variety of corn, more than 500 variety of potatoes... I can go on and on.” I guess you will need to try it for yourself as Roxanne’s place is unique.

Asi Es Mi Peru is open every day from 12 noon - 10:30 pm. They are closed on Monday evening. Have a peak on their website <https://www.asiesmiperuenaruba.com/> or Facebook así es mi Perú. For reservations send email to reservations@asiesmiperuenaruba.com

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The Aruba Tourism Authority honor loyal visitors on the island

EAGLE BEACH —Recently, Ms. Josette Croes, representative of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor Loyal and friendly visitors of Aruba as Distinguished Visitors at their home away from home. The symbolic honorary title is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba between 10-20-35 and more consecutive years.

The honorees were Mr. William and Mrs. Maureen Haska from New York. The lovely couple stated that they love coming to the island for its people, lovely weather and beautiful beaches.

Croes together with members of Divi Aruba Beach Resort presented the couple with the certificate and handed over some gifts to them and thanked them for choosing Aruba as their vacation destination and as their home away from home for so many years. □



Celebrate Love!

Valentine's Day is the celebration of love, beauty and romantic mood between couples and/or friends. While enjoying your stay in Aruba you can make this day extra special by surprising your love with the help of Aruba Today.

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Send us your Love Story to share with our readers! Tell us how long you've been together, how you've met, what makes your relationship special and some tips for a long and happy relationship.

What Will We Do?

We will publish your picture and message in the local section of Aruba Today on Monday February 14 in our printed newspaper and on our website and Facebook page. Send it by email at news@arubaday.com by latest Friday February 11.

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Exploring the Mainstreet of San Nicolas



SAN NICOLAS— At Just 11 miles southeast from Oranjestad you will enter the city San Nicolas, also known as Sunrise City or Chocolate City. A city that is rich in authentic culture and island charm. San Nicolas is Aruba's second largest city and was once a bustling company town dominated by the oil industry since the early 1930's.

Over the course of four decades, its demographics had changed immensely due to a stream of Afro-Caribbean and South American workers who came to fill the jobs in the oil refinery between the 1920's until the 1960's. To this day traces of the multicultural influences in culinary offerings and customs, housing

and population are clearly visible in San Nicolas - more than anywhere else on the island.

Flow of history

if you are looking for history San Nicolas has it. Here you will find three amazing museums, The Museum of Industry, the Community Museum and the Carnival Euphoria, all within walking distance from one another. The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history which began in the 19th century. Here you will learn about gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and the tourism industry which made San Nicolas once a bustling business center. Experience the touching stories

of those who were part of this history.

Nicolaas Store built in 1940 and renovated in 2014 is the home of the Community Museum. The collection is remarkable and spans millennia. Ancient fossils stand next to tableaux of an authentically recreated colonial kitchen and bedroom and 19th-century barber-shop, just to name a few of the items of old-time Aruba that has been preserved. A collection of artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance can be found here for the purpose of education or enjoyment.

The new San Nicolas

In the shadow of the refinery, an art capital is quietly beginning to grow. This is the new San Nicolas, a place that is starting to become a magnet for all that is young, cool and hip in Aruba. Indeed, San Nicolas has all of the ingredients of an emerging cultural hub — varied history, interesting architecture, and, perhaps most importantly, an urban layout that makes it walkable. As you walk around, the streets are silent but



the walls are loud, filled with bright, colorful murals painted by a collection of artists from around the world. Thanks to the efforts of various art organizations in Aruba, such as Art Rules Aruba and Aruba Art Fair, San Nicolas has had quite the aesthetic makeover with regards to vibrant street art. Each year more and more stunning murals are replacing broken down buildings with colorful art pieces that keep brightening up SunriseCity.

Must See, Do, Buy & Eat

A little bit of everything

can be found in the main street. Stores selling shoes, clothing, jewelry you name it. Arts & crafts by Artisa Art & Gallery, a design store in which you can immerse yourself in discovering genuine and locally made arts and crafts which reflect the diversification of the Aruban craft heritage and the artistic supply of artisans. Don't miss out on trying the exquisite food offered by the cafes and restaurants or just enjoy a peaceful walk admiring the murals, mosaic benches and all the history San Nicolas has to offer. □

New prices for petroleum products February 9, 2022



ORANJESTAD – The Minister Economic Affairs, Communications and Sustainable Development announces the adjusted prices for petroleum products starting February 9, 2022:

Gasoline unleaded-premium:
245,7 cent p/ltr. (+ 15,1 cent)
Gasoil LS:
214,1 cent p/ltr. (+ 19,1 cent)
Kerosene:
196,3 cent p/ltr. (+ 18,6 cent)

BBO(turnover tax)/BAZV(Health tax)/BAVP is included in the prices. □



Millennial Money: Watch for debt collectors, scams on social

By **LAUREN SCHWAHN** of **NerdWallet**

Social media is where you watch cooking videos, gaze at photos of dreamy travel destinations and doomscroll through endless news headlines. Now, sites like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter could also be where debt collectors slide into your DMs.

In late 2021, rule changes under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act went into effect that specify how third-party debt collectors can communicate through social media, email and texts. Consumer advocates like April Kuehnhoff, a staff attorney at the National Consumer Law Center, are concerned that these rules could lead to confusion and an uptick in scams.

"It's much cheaper to use electronic communications to reach out to more people. We'll see a rise in the number of illegitimate actors who are impersonating debt collectors and emailing, direct messaging or texting people in an attempt to get them to pay money for debts that they don't actually owe," Kuehnhoff says.

Spotting the signs and knowing your rights can help you guard against unfair and fraudulent debt collection practices. Here's what to watch for and how to stay safe as you sift through notifications.

RECOGNIZE THE RED FLAGS

Several warning signs can



In this Sept. 16, 2017, file photo, a person uses a smart phone in Chicago.

Associated Press

alert you to abusive behavior or scams:

— **THE MESSAGE ISN'T PRIVATE**. Debt collectors can request to join your friends or followers as long as they tell you they're debt collectors. However, the FDCPA states that all communications must be private. That means messages can't be visible to the public or people in your network on the platform. If you receive a message that others can see, that signals a bad actor.

— **IMPORTANT INFORMATION IS MISSING**. Debt collectors are legally obligated to share specific details about the debt, including the amount owed, the creditor's name and information about your rights. They'll usually provide this information, known as a validation notice, the first time they contact you or within five days.

"If someone's just saying

'I'm a debt collector' and nothing else, I would definitely be suspect from the start," says Katie Bossler, a quality assurance specialist at GreenPath, a nonprofit credit counseling agency.

— **YOU'RE THREATENED OR HARASSED**. "Sometimes scammers will threaten consumers with arrest or deportation or try to scare them into paying quickly," Kuehnhoff says. But it's illegal for collectors to make threats or use violent or profane language.

A collector also cannot legally sue you if the debt is time-barred, or past the statute of limitations. How do you know if your debt is time-barred? Research your state's laws and review your payment history on your credit reports. Or, consider seeking help from your local legal aid office or a nonprofit credit counseling agency.

— **YOU'RE ASKED TO MAKE**

AN UNUSUAL PAYMENT.

Fraudsters often seek fast payment through difficult-to-recover methods. A legitimate debt collector won't pressure you to pay using questionable means such as a money transfer, bitcoin terminal or prepaid card, Kuehnhoff says. "They won't tell you to go down to the Apple store and buy an Apple (gift) card."

Don't pay anything without first confirming that the debt and the collector are real. You can learn more about fake and abusive debt collectors from the Federal Trade Commission.

KNOW AND PROTECT YOUR RIGHTS

The FDCPA gives you certain protections. For example, you can opt out of communications. Collectors are required to provide an easy, free way to end social media contact. That won't erase the debt, however.

You also have the right to dispute a debt that you believe is incorrect or not yours. However, you'll have to submit a written request within 30 days of receiving notice if you want to dispute or get more information about the debt. Information on how to do either must be included in the collector's initial communication to you.

How can you verify the debt and the collector? Bossler suggests starting with pulling your free credit reports from AnnualCre-

ditReport.com. "Make a list of the debts that you owe: the creditors, the balances, the account numbers. The debt collector will often reference the last four digits of the account number," Bossler says.

You may be dealing with a collection department for the original creditor, making it easier to match up the details. But the original creditor may have sold the debt to an outside company. That third-party collector should provide information such as their name, company and mailing address. Use these details to double-check their authenticity.

"Several states have their debt collection licenses registered at the NMLS, the National Multistate Licensing (System)," Kuehnhoff says. "Even if your state doesn't use it, it can be a helpful place to check if this name is a legitimate debt collection name that's registered in other states."

Even if everything checks out, don't feel pressured to pay right away. Making a payment could revive a debt that was past the statute of limitations. Instead, give yourself time to make a plan that works for you and your budget.

If a debt collector violates your rights or you encounter a scam, you can file a complaint with the FTC, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau or your state attorney general's office. □

U.S. and Japan reach deal to make most steel imports tax-free

By **JOSH BOAK**
Associated Press

U.S. government officials said Monday that they reached an agreement to essentially lift the 25% tariff that former President Donald Trump imposed on imported Japanese steel.

The deal with Japan would exclude the first 1.25 million metric tons of imported steel from the tax. That amount of steel is equal to the average that Americans imported from Japan in 2018 and 2019, effec-

tively nullifying the tariffs while also allowing for taxes to be charged on any imports in excess of that sum.

"The deal we reached will strengthen America's steel industry and ensure its workforce stays competitive, while also providing more access to cheaper steel and addressing a major irritant between the United States and Japan, one of our most important allies," Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said in

a statement. U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai said the agreement with Japan along with a separate deal last year on steel with the European Union will put them in a better place to compete against China, the world's second largest economy. The Biden administration has bluntly centered its policies on competing against China, which accounts for the majority of global steel production, according to



Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo testifies before a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2022, to examine expanding broadband access, focusing on the Department of Commerce broadband programs in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Associated Press

the Belgium-based World Steel Association. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 39 Virtuous

1 Spice from nutmeg

5 Biting remark

9 Cake cover

11 Blender speed

12 More polite

13 Fuming

14 Lupino of film

15 Reception feature

17 Courtroom conference

19 Tax org.

20 Stone unit

21 Blue

22 When Ovid wrote "Ars Amatoria"

24 Derek and Diddley

26 Writer L'Amour

29 Plop down

30 Place to get steamers

32 Prying tool

34 Abel's mother

35 Find darling

36 "Mack the Knife" singer

38 Track athlete

40 Spotted

41 Cronos

DOWN

1 Some skirts

2 Having a low pH

3 Summer noise-maker

4 Hydrocarbon suffix

5 Overcook

6 Mideast peninsula

7 Slow down

8 Saloon orders

10 Singer Josh

11 Docking site

16 Kneecap

18 Aphrodite's son

21 Pond growth

23 Floor makeup

24 One under par

25 "The Stunt Man" star

27 European peninsula

28 Bank activity

29 Con games

30 Trucker with a handle

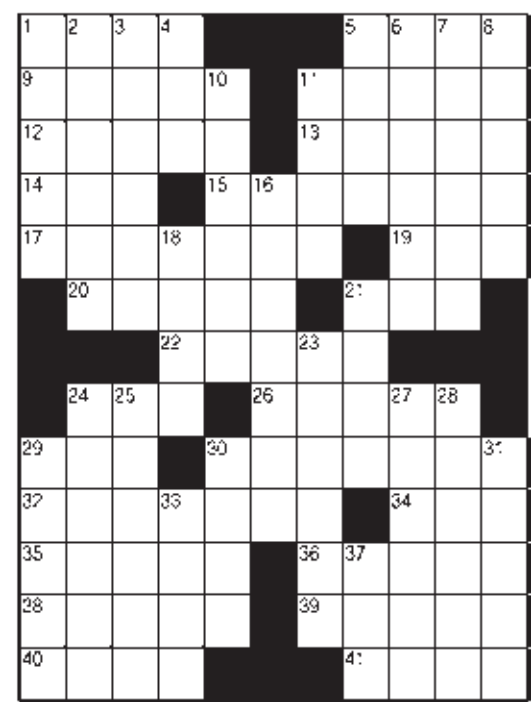
31 Budget amounts

33 Small songbird

37 Contented sound



Yesterday's answer



A X Y D L B A A X R
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-9 CRYPTOQUOTE

L P D U D T Z Y W P O I D W T X

X I D T D L O W O D H T D X P D T U D

X I W X W P O J D T O X N X I D

U L F T W X L N P O N M F D W C X Z

— HITLOXNKIDT YNTQDZ
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: CHILDHOOD
SOMETIMES DOES PAY A SECOND VISIT TO MAN;
YOUTH, NEVER. — ANNA JAMESON

Turtles dying from eating trash show plastics scourge in UAE



A Hawksbill sea turtle, that was found on a nearby beach, is displayed after an autopsy was performed along with trash mostly plastic materials, top, and food items, left, removed from the turtle's stomach, at the Al Hefaiyah Conservation Center lab, in the city of Kalba, on the east coast of the United Arab Emirates, Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2022.

Associated Press

By ISABEL DEBRE

Associated Press

KALBA, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The hawksbill

sea turtle lay belly-up on the metal autopsy table, its shell ashen and stomach taut.

A week ago, the adolescent turtle washed up on a beach in Kalba, a city on the east coast of the United Arab Emirates. Once unspoiled, the coast of mangrove trees is now fouled by piles of trash dragged from nearby landfills. Strewed across the shore are plastic bags, packages, bottle caps — and far too often, dead turtles.

At first, Fadi Yaghmour, a marine expert who has examined some 200 turtles for the first research on the subject from the Middle East, extracted typical fare from the carcass — squid beaks and oysters.

Then, a culprit for the creature's demise became clear: shriveled balloons and plastic foam, some of the last things the turtle ate. "It's probably malnour-

ished," Yaghmour told The Associated Press last week as he worked. Plastic clogs turtles' intestinal tracts, he said, and can cause them to starve.

This turtle is one of 64 retrieved from the shores of Kalba and Khor Fakkan, in the wider emirate of Sharjah, to be analyzed in Yaghmour's lab. His team of researchers have published a new study in the Marine Pollution Bulletin that seeks to document the damage and danger of the throwaway plastic that has surged in use around the world and in the UAE, along with other marine debris.

A staggering 75% of all dead green turtles and 57% of all loggerhead turtles in Sharjah had eaten marine debris, including plastic bags, bottle caps, rope and fishing nets, the study found. The only other research from the region, published in 1985, found that none of the studied turtles in the Gulf of Oman had eaten plastic.

"When the majority of sea turtles have plastics in their bodies, you know you have a significant problem," Yaghmour said. "If there's ever a time to care about turtles, it is now." Turtles may have survived the mass extinction that killed off dinosaurs millions of years ago, but today they're disappearing around the world. □



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1 Bed ocean front \$13,000
1 Bed ocean View \$11,000

GOLD SEASON

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2 Bed Ocean view \$9,500
1 Bed oceanfront \$9,000
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Downtown

The long-delayed 'Death on the Nile' runs aground

By **JAKE COYLE**
AP Film Writer

Kenneth Branagh's Agatha Christie adaptation "Death on the Nile" begins with a flashback to the trenches of World War I before shifting to 1930s London two decades later, but that's nothing compared to the time that's passed since Branagh's preceding 2017 whodunit "Murder on the Orient Express."

That film, which packed a bevy of stars aboard an opulent locomotive, was a saggy contrivance that lacked the warm fizz of Sidney Lumet's 1974 version, with Albert Finney. But "Murder on the Orient Express" did offer a welcome reminder of two immutable cinematic maxims: Train movies are irresistible and whodunits are, generally speaking, a hoot. It was an unexpected box-office hit, and a sequel, with Branagh again directing and returning as the mustachioed Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, was quickly ordered up with visions of something like a Christie-verse.

But the pandemic, which partly accounts for release postponements stretching two years, is not all that has delayed "Death on the Nile." One of its stars, Armie Hammer, plunged into scandal, and the studio reportedly considered reshooting the film with another actor. Even the studio disappeared when 20th Century Fox was acquired



This image released by 20th Century Studios shows Gal Gadot, left, and Ali Fazal in a scene from "Death on the Nile."

by the Walt Disney Co. Still, the biggest sea change to swamp "Death on the Nile" may have been something else: Rian Johnson's "Knives Out" kind of blew it out the water. Johnson's 2019 mystery wasn't based on a Christie novel, but it was affectionately styled after one, and giddily brought the genre into contemporary times. Here, with Daniel Craig as the very Poirot-like investigator Benoit Blanc, was the exciting whodunit revival. (A Mediterranean-set sequel is due out later this year.)

So "Death on the Nile," with Hammer in tow, is making its humbled way into theaters this Friday. A glossy,

star-studded adaptation of Christie's 1937 novel, scripted by Michael Green, is a better movie than "Murder on the Orient Express" but still feels like a creaky murder mystery too insecure to simply let its talky characters and spiraling plot lines play out. Instead, "Death on the Nile," stuck somewhere between the past and today, tries vainly to spruce up an old-fashioned style of movie with buckets of CGI and a nervous camera that can't stop swooping around.

It begins with a flashback to Poirot as a soldier at war, where his cunning reading of the winds leads to a promising offensive, along

with a battle wound that ultimately prompts Poirot's choice of facial hair. We know where the Joker got his malaise and Superman his powers; now we can finally account for the origin of Poirot's stache.

And certainly, Branagh's portrayal of Christie's seminal detective leans into the iconic. His Poirot is especially smirking, knowing and mustache-twirling. For much of the movie early on, we see him in mugging close-up and ominous silhouette simply watching — especially at a London blues club where Salome Otterbourne (Sophie Okonedo) is performing and a love triangle is pos-

sibly forming on the dance floor. There writhes the passionate lovers Simon Doyle (Hammer) and Jacqueline (Emma Mackey). She pauses to introduce her fiancé to the wealthy socialite Linnet Ridgeway (Gal Gadot) and appeal to her for a job for Doyle.

When Poirot turns up months later at the Pyramids in Egypt, Doyle and Linnet are married and honeymooning. The desert scene is computer generated and a little ridiculous. An old acquaintance, Linus Windlesham (a nicely against type Russell Brand), a doctor and Linnet's former fiancé, is flying a kite halfway up one of the pyramids. Linnet briefly is seen in the garb of Cleopatra, like a mini-coming attraction for an in-development movie trailed by its own controversy.

All, including a jilted, jealous Jacqueline, board the Karnak, a handsome riverboat steamer. For "Death on the Nile," it's a polished set for the movie's main action. Just about everyone on the ship has some connection to the newlyweds. Among the persons of interest are the painter Euphemia (Annette Bening), Linnet's lawyer, Andrew Katchadourian (Ali Fazal), Otterbourne and her niece (Letitia Wright), Linnet's godmother Marie Van Schuyler (Jennifer Saunders) and her companion (Dawn French). □



Entertainer Snoop Dogg walks on the field before an NFL football game between the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the New Orleans Saints Sunday, Dec. 19, 2021, in Tampa, Fla.

Associated Press

By **JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr.**
AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Snoop Dogg says he won't let

Snoop Dogg calls Super Bowl halftime show 'dream come true'

the big Super Bowl stage rattle his nerves. The ultra-smooth rapper said he will worry about his upcoming halftime performance after the fact. "For me, when performing, I never let the moment get bigger than me," said Snoop Dogg in a recent interview with The Associated Press from his studio compound in Inglewood, California, a suburb of Los Angeles where the Super Bowl will be held Sunday. He'll take the stage with Dr. Dre, Emi-

nem, Kendrick Lamar and Mary J. Blige. "I'm not going to understand it until it happens," he continued. "While it's happening, I'm in the zone. I'm stuck to the script, laser focused, being on point, sounding good, looking good and feeling good. I want to give off a great presentation. After the fact, it's when I'll be nervous about watching it to see what the reaction is. But while I'm going through it, it's nothing." Snoop Dogg calls performing at the Su-

per Bowl in his home state a "dream come true." He said he's looking forward to sharing the stage with music legends who are his friends. "We're all one. We're all united together," said the 50-year-old rapper, who said he might perform his 1994 classic "Gin and Juice," but hasn't made a final decision yet. "If you really look at it, that's what the world needs to understand that we need to come together as opposed to division or separation." □

AP sources: Pelicans acquire C.J. McCollum in 7-player trade

By Brett Martel
AP Sports Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The New Orleans Pelicans have acquired guard C.J. McCollum from the Portland Trail Blazers as part of a seven-player trade, said two people familiar with the situation.

The Pelicans will also receive forwards Larry Nance Jr. and Tony Snell in the deal, while the Trail Blazers get forward Josh Hart, and guards Tomas Staoransky, Nickeil Alexander-Walker and Didi Louzada, as well as draft compensation in the form of a 2022 protected first round draft choice and two future second-rounders. The people spoke to The Associated Press Tuesday on condition of anonymity because the deal has not been made official.

The trade marks the end of an era in Portland, where McCollum has been paired with Damian Lillard in the backcourt since 2013. Portland has reached the playoffs every season since they drafted McCollum. However, the Blazers struggled in the postseason, reaching the Western Conference finals only once while being eliminated in the first round five times.

The 30-year-old McCollum is averaging 20.5 points, 4.5 assists and 4.3 rebounds this season.

He gives the Pelicans a



Portland Trail Blazers guard C.J. McCollum, right, drives against Oklahoma City Thunder forward Kenrich Williams in the first half of an NBA basketball game Monday, Jan. 31, 2022, in Oklahoma City.

Associated Press

needed outside shooting threat at a time when New Orleans appears to be on the upswing under first-year coach Willie Green — despite playing this season without star forward Zion Williamson. After starting 1-12, the Pelicans (21-32) entered Tuesday's games on the heels of a three-game road winning streak and occupying the final play-in spot in the Western Conference.

Williamson, incidentally, has been in Oregon trying to rehabilitate from offseason surgery to repair his fractured right foot. It is un-

clear if he will be ready to return this season.

New Orleans is making less than 33% from 3-point range this season and they are 29th in the league 3-pointers made. McCollum has shot no less than 37.5% from beyond the arc every season from deep in every season of his career, while shooting 38.4% overall for his career.

In 2019, McCollum signed a three-year contract extension worth \$100 million that runs through the 2023-24 season. It took effect this season.

This marks the second multi-

ple-player trade the Blazers have made in advance of Thursday's deadline. On Friday Portland sent Norman Powell and Robert Covington to the Los Angeles Clippers in exchange for Eric Bledsoe, Justise Winslow and Keon Johnson. That move was widely seen as financial, as it put the Blazers below the luxury tax threshold.

Lillard, a six-time All-Star, has been sidelined since the start of the year with an abdominal injury that required surgery. Like Williamson, it is unclear when, or if, he will return this season,

but Lillard was at the team's practice facility on Monday putting up a few shots.

Hart this offseason agreed to a three-year extension with New Orleans which is worth \$37.9 million and includes a third-year player option. He has been a popular and productive role player in New Orleans since being traded to New Orleans during the 2019 offseason — along with forward Brandon Ingram, guard Lonzo Ball and two first-round draft picks — from the Los Angeles Lakers as part of a deal that paired Anthony Davis with LeBron James on the Lakers.

Ball has since been traded to Chicago. Hart has averaged 13.4 points and 7.8 rebounds this season.

Alexander-Walker was one of three first-round draft choices the Pelicans made in 2019. He went 17th overall, after New Orleans had taken Williamson first with their own draft choice and center Jaxson Hayes eighth with the first of the two first-rounders acquired from the Lakers.

Alexander-Walker has struggled to produce consistently in his first three seasons but has been prolific in spurts. He is averaging 12.8 points this season with a season-high of 33 points and a career-high last season of 37 points. □

Ventura: 'Natural reaction' to suspect burly players of PEDs

By RONALD BLUM
AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Robin Ventura understands why some people might be suspicious of any players who appear bulked up when they report when workouts start following the lockout. Now an assistant coach at Oklahoma State, Ventura was a two-time All-Star and a six-time Gold Glove third baseman from 1989-2004. He played through the height of the Steroids Era and the start of drug testing, then managed the Chicago White Sox from 2012-16. "I think that would just be a natural reaction,"

he said Tuesday. "I think even when there was testing, somebody showed up big, I think people still questioned that. So I don't see any reason why that would change." Speaking during a news conference called by the New York Mets to announce the return of Old-Timers Day for the first time since 1994, Ventura said he had not been aware Major League Baseball and the players' association stopped steroids testing when the collective bargaining agreement and Joint Drug Program expired Dec. 1.

U.S. Anti-Doping Agency

CEO Travis Tygart said the halt in testing is a concern. Former Mets Daniel Murphy and Cliff Floyd also spoke during the virtual news conference. Murphy, who last played in 2020, was a member of the players' ruling executive subcommittee when the union rejected management's pandemic-shortened 60-game schedule two years ago. The union filed a still-pending grievance, claiming Major League Baseball did not play a season as lengthy as was possible.

With spring training workouts unlikely to start as scheduled on Feb. 16,



New York Mets Robin Ventura watches the path of his grand slam hit off Houston Astros pitcher Jay Powell in the seventh inning of a baseball game on May 1, 2001, at Shea Stadium in New York.

Associated Press

owners are meeting from Tuesday through Thursday in Orlando, Florida. Union lawyers met with players

in Arizona on Tuesday and have meetings in Florida scheduled for the following two days. □

Smith becomes 1 of 5 minority head coaches with Texans hire

By KRISTIE RIEKEN

AP Sports Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Lovie Smith reflected on his past in the NFL on Tuesday as he was introduced as the new coach of the Houston Texans, a hire that made him one of five minority head coaches in the NFL.

"It's not often you get a chance to lead three professional football teams," he said. "I don't know if there's a guy who looks like me that's had the opportunity to do that. So that's pretty special."

Smith, who is Black, joins Pittsburgh's Mike Tomlin, New York Jets coach Robert Saleh, Washington's Ron Rivera, and Mike McDaniell, who was hired Sunday to coach Miami, as the league's only minority head coaches.

The 63-year-old Smith, who spent last season as Houston's associate head coach and defensive coordinator, previously coached the Chicago Bears for nine seasons and Tampa Bay for two seasons ending in 2015. He takes over for Culley, who is also Black, and was fired after one season.

"Coach Smith is one of the most respected figures in the league," general manager Nick Caserio said. "I think a lot of us were able to see that this year. So, as I worked through this and got to the end point, I realized the best decision and the best opportunity for this organization to move forward was with the choice of Lovie Smith as the next



New Houston Texans NFL football team head coach Lovie Smith speaks at an introductory press conference, Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022, at NRG Stadium in Houston.

head coach."

Houston interviewed multiple candidates over the past few weeks, including Brian Flores, Hines Ward, Josh McCown and Joe Lombardi. Flores, who is Black, was fired despite posting winning records in the final two of his three seasons in Miami.

Flores sued the NFL, the Dolphins and two other teams last week over alleged racist hiring practices for coaches and general managers. Flores issued a statement through his legal team Monday night that said in part that the Texans didn't hire him because of "his decision to stand up against racial inequality across the NFL."

Caserio denied that assertion Tuesday.

"There were conversations with Brian after that took place, so that really didn't affect the process at all," he said. Caserio also denied reports the team had planned to hire McCown, who has no coaching experience at any level aside from volunteering with his son's high school team.

"There were never plans to hire anybody until we came to an end point," Caserio said.

Much of Tuesday's news conference was devoted to issues of diversity, with Smith joining Tomlin and McDaniell, who is biracial, as the league's only Black head coaches.

"There's a problem," Smith said. "It's obvious that there is a problem. But what are you going to do about it? There's a lot of different talk on how what you should do. But I think it always comes down to action." Smith noted that he got his NFL start on the staff of Tony Dungy, who is also African American, and said he believes it's his responsibility to help other Black coaches ascend to the NFL's top jobs. Caserio also addressed the lack of diversity among NFL head coaches and what he can do to change things.

"It's about finding solutions," he said. "I certainly don't have all the answers. I can't even fathom what that an-

swer or solution is, but to be a part of that solution, that's what we can make a commitment to doing."

Along with the hiring of Smith, the Texans promoted Pep Hamilton to offensive coordinator. Hamilton, who spent last season as passing game coordinator and quarterbacks coach, takes over for Tim Kelly, who was fired after the season. Smith announced Tuesday that he would continue to call the plays on defense in his new role.

Smith was 144-81 with the Bears, leading them to the Super Bowl in the 2006 season where they lost to the Colts. He struggled in his stint with Tampa Bay, going 2-14 in his first season and 6-10 the following year before being let go.

Now he's at the helm of a team in the process of a complete rebuild after trading or releasing almost all of its top players in the past couple of years. The Texans went 4-13 last season in a year when star quarterback Deshaun Watson did not play after a trade request and amid 22 lawsuits alleging sexual harassment or assault.

It was the second consecutive season when the Texans finished with four wins after winning the AFC South in both 2018 and 2019.

Smith was asked about his expectations for the upcoming season after two difficult years.

"History tells you can make a quick turnaround," he said. □

Associated Press



Caitlyn Jenner speaks during a news conference in the Venice Beach section of Los Angeles, Thursday, Aug. 12, 2021.

Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Caitlyn Jenner is off to the races again, launching a team in a single-seater motor racing championship for female drivers.

Jenner, the former Olympic champion and reality TV personality who had a failed bid for California governor, started the Jenner Racing team in the W

Caitlyn Jenner launches race team in race series for women

Series for the 2022 season. The 72-year-old Jenner will oversee the day-to-day running of her team, including the driver lineup and landing sponsors to compete in the series that often runs on Formula One race weekends.

"As a believer in fair competition, a lover of motor racing, and a supporter of all women in sport from the grassroots to elite level, W Series ticks every

box for me and is a fusion of the different aspects of my career," she said. "A championship dedicated to inspiring young girls and giving women the chance to succeed in roles throughout what has traditionally been a male-dominated industry, W Series is changing the face of motorsport." Jenner, a 1976 decathlon Olympic gold medalist who came out as a transgender woman

in 2015, debuted as a professional racing driver at the 24 Hours of Daytona race in 1980 as part of Jim Busby's team. Jenner went on to compete professionally in the IMSA Camel GT Championship, as a factory driver for Ford Motor Company and Jack Roush, for the next six years, making a total of 57 starts. "As has always been the case, I'm in it to win it," she said. □